

ONE WHO PURSUES - DRAFT

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CHAPTER ONE: THE NIGHT MEETING

Something was far off in the distance avoiding the rowdy howls but closely observing the grey smoke that rose from the lips of some rowdy teenagers sitting in a circle around a warm, tender fire. The thing's small, thin feet rested on and its toes curled around a beige tree branch that extended a couple yards out in the perpendicular direction of the fire. The odor of the tender charcoal burning from the overwhelming embers reached the thing prompting a bothered response to the stimuli. It departed the branch to parts unknown not long after.

Those fiendish bastards.

Maxwell tensed up, as the meth coursed through his veins. His light brown t-shirt converged into his petite chest, while his sober jeans tightened around the crotch area. He was the one with the pipe of meth in hand making an effort to enjoy the idyllic fire and inviting the nightly breeze into his eternally cold heart—but it instead brought further discomfort.

"Shouldn't we, uh, do more than spout threats at the Suttons?" Darius questioned—without a hint of idleness. The other two—Weston and Paisley—and Maxwell discerned a stubborn frown on Darius' acne infested and greasy face. Maxwell, as he is the one who leads the band of teens, promptly responded: "Why yes Darius,

I thought it was necessary to address this hindrance at tonight's meeting—with all involved."

"As the Grizzly Riders, the foes of the Black Paragon, we need not empower them into overthrowing us. We know by now the townsfolk, rather than join us in arms, surrender to the cult for their own safety—and the rewards they offer. It's become patent by now that this is ignorance at its finest; they shamelessly steal the innocence of us and other families and refuse to admit to their wrongdoings," Maxwell zealously announced. The others are acquainted with the consequences associated with the Black Paragon's actions: Weston and Paisley have to deal with a mother who lost all sensibility and became mad after her loss, and Darius has to deal with the burden of not having a mother—instead, having a drunkard for a father.

We must continue to struggle for the sake of our blissful future. Maxwell reasoned.

As the flames of the fire burned more vigorously, Maxwell resumed: "What we will see in giving them the taste of their own medicine is a better tomorrow for us, and I daresay, for the townsfolk of Canterbrook. Bear in mind that you all mustn't run from this timely opportunity, otherwise the Suttons and other Black Paragon members will make you their puppet—that alone sends shivers down my spine."

Maxwell approached Darius who was sitting sloped on the other end of the fire, and in a solemn resonance not all different than his usual one, asked Darius: "Hey there, Darius. Are you ready to thrust that mighty wrath of yours on the ones who caused you and the rest of us so much misery in our lives? I know your dear

mother would want her revenge for the ones who stole her kind spirit from this world. Come on, Darius, drop the pacifism for once. Please? For you friends."

Darius felt a chill ringing in his dark skin, as he glared intensely at Maxwell looking back at the horrid memory that he so longed to forget; he was powerless and could only muster spite—albeit, far lesser than the spite felt by the others. Maxwell agreed with his sentiments and asserted: "Now that I discussed the preliminary details, it is also essential we consider our *modus operandi*. I'd like to hear all opinions, so let your imaginations run wild, heh."

Weston, who was a few yards away from Maxwell, returned: "How about we lynch em? I'm sure good ole Darius over there would like that, wouldn't ya—" Weston paused and observed Darius pointing his head down trying to ignore that raging word—lynch. Fuck, I overstepped my boundaries. Weston said to himself. He paid heed and said no more to the boy lost in melancholy.

"How about instead, we shoot them—a shotgun, a rifle, whatever is deemed vital by you, Maxwell—to make the operation more or less trouble-free," Paisley suggested. Weston morphed his mellow visage into one full of peeve. *Is she fucking serious?* He argued: "Sis, are ya hearing yerself right now? It's ludicrous to give those fuckheads a painless death. I swear, ya better not—" "My idea is needed to succeed, Weston!" She shouted. "For once, will you not give in to those emotions, please?"

Fucking hell. Ugh...she sure is a know-it-all. Sheesh, sis just doesn't grasp the situation at hand. She's too damn easy on people. But even so, all we got is each other. Weston reflected.

The boy turned his eyes to the sky, where the moon was at its peak in the sky, as all the insects chanted louder and more frequently than mere minutes ago; the hour of midnight has befallen them.

"I'll have to agree with Paisley's suggestion," Darius said nervously. An uncomfortably tense silence occurred, where Darius caught Maxwell coming off as unimpressed—denoted by the grimace on his face, Paisley benevolently smiling back at him, and Weston more or less tensing up on the edge of the wooden log he sat on. *Those fiendish bastards.* Maxwell handed Weston the pipe of meth which had been in his hand for a little while—eventually, Weston was able to settle down again.

Come on, Darius, drop the pacifism for once. Please? For you friends.

"What a group, heh," Maxwell mused to himself. "First off, Paisley always seems to refrain from getting her hands dirty—something that only forbears us from our goal. Weston's idea is better in every way regardless of the fact that it did sour Darius. Augh, I can't stop remembering the clamorous cries—which still echo in my ears—of that harrowing night last year."

Those fiendish bastards.

As the glaring fire roared with violence, Weston suggested: "Then how about we, ya know, set their fucking house ablaze, heh? Wouldn't it be lovely to watch em burn?" The teens, with their dense, widened pupils, eyeballed him with amusement, just before he handed back the pipe of meth back to Maxwell.

"Excellent idea, Weston!" Maxwell replied. "That's quite the scheme, and with this, the fall of the Black Paragon will be assured, while they burn in the inferno of both our loathing and their very own towards us 'till Hell pays them a visit, haha." The spirits of the teens hence spiraled malignantly on hearing those words. Maxwell's and Weston's spirits especially were aroused further by the meth streaming through their body—everything appeared to be in order for tomorrow.

Against Darius' and Paisley's recommendation of a more passive alternative, Maxwell announced: "In this circumstance, since more of you side with arson, that will be our *modus operandi*." *They will be in despair, haha.*

"What we need for tomorrow is supplies for burning a building; not to mention the opportunity to sneakily break inside, but we are aware why it is going to be a grueling task. Those townsfolk practically idolize them as prophets and would alert them of intruders, if we went head on without playing carefully."

Could they be onto us already hiding in the vicinity? Maybe in the bushes? Or they could have heard everything? Fuck! I think wrapping up this conversation for tomorrow would be best. This could be a ploy. There has to be something; I can feel it lurking around us far-off somewhere.

Maxwell stood up from his seat on the wooden log by the fire, hastily lit out the pipe of meth, and put his frail hands in his shabby pockets gawking at a strange presence that billowed in the fire—and felt cut off from this world.

It has to be that—the thing in the fire must be bothering me. It's such a despairing sensation. Oh God...

Thus far, the presence was keen on reaching closer to his conceited but disturbed soul. Maxwell clenched his yellow, rotten teeth with little enamel, and begged the dreadful spirit to go away—go far away from him. Moments later, it vanished into oblivion, thus he considered it to be nothing more than fatigue from his heavy smoking; the others didn't seem frightened by it either.

"Hey...uh, it's getting dark," Maxwell said—under a bewildering constraint. "Um, could we please continue this in the morning? Please? This shit I smoked really is making me paranoid over everything—it's not like it's happened before to me. That fucking thing or whatever—it will fucking return...I know it will." The other teens hearing this understood Maxwell's paranoia; they've dealt with it before many times, and this was no different than the other times.

The night was turning more restless: the crickets chirped louder, the luminous stars glimmered with jolly, and the wind rippled with force. The teens simultaneously rose up from their seats on the logs; already, they were prepared to set off for their homes.

"Are you okay, man?" Weston questioned. "Oh, no no...don't worry about me," Maxwell promptly responded. "It's just the meth-induced paranoia we all get, heh. I'm just tired; I'll sleep it off in no time."

He tried to imagine the new tomorrow that awaited him and the others; meanwhile, the dark abyss where that presence originated

from followed him. *Our fears can't take over us provided we look towards our ambition, or else, the Suttons and townsfolk will have the upperhand—those conniving pricks.*

Such a despairing sensation.

"Well then, I guess we ought to go then, sis," Weston insisted to Paisley. Darius passively responded: "Hey, me too. Umm, you see, my father would be enraged if I was to go past my curfew of 1:00—it's already 12:50 at night. I would rather not get smacked in the head with a bottle of his cheap rum and have him send me outside to sleep with the wild animals. I'm not a fan of the wolves that prey on me all night. But, uh...thanks though, Maxwell. I guess I'll see you tomorrow."

The moonlight and stars illuminated the brownish grass littered with animal feces, sly spiders and other insects, among other wonders of nature—paving the way to the teens' modestly-sized homes along Timber Street, a mere five minutes from where they were located. The houses in their neighborhood were broken down and old and had an odd presence—similar to the earlier one—emitting from them, like an invisible foreign entity was roaming the neighborhood, but nobody could see whatever it was—not even a silhouette of it. The croak of a shadowy bird obscured by the night sky infiltrated the teens' ears, during which the street lights flickered like Morse code, and ambiance prevailed as the only sound.

Maxwell reached his middle-class brick home which was surrounded by tall, thick grass a couple yards in height, and dead Hickory trees slumped towards the ground. The timber front door vacant of exterior decor opened outwards by the hand of Maxwell's father.

He had to be wired on meth. Maxwell thought. This assumption was due to a bag his old man was carrying; it had some kind of crystallized white substance cut into shards. Maxwell could only observe his old man shouting something without the existence of sound—excluding the nightly ambiance—but Maxwell eventually discerned more words, then phrases, and lastly hollers the closer he got to the doorstep. His old man, under closer inspection, was entirely disheveled with a torn up all-white t-shirt, baggy jeans lazily pulled up to his waist, and widened eyes ominously staring into him, like his father was under a trance.

His father shouted: “Boy! What in the hell is the meaning of this, huh? Huh?” Maxwell tried to conjure an excuse under the pressure—something ordinary for him—but his old man quickly interrupted: “For fucks sakes, I told ya to be here by 1-o’-clock SHARP! Fucking 1-o’-clock SHARP!! Hey, ya listening, boy? Look at the fucking time now: it’s 2:30. Explain this shit now. Now! Or I will beat the shit out of ya like no tomorrow. Ya should know this by now, isn’t that right boy? It’s been an awful while since you got some good marks on yer body from yers truly.”

Let me take a guess: Yer late because ya screwed that whore Paisley, right? Yeah, Weston’s sister—that retarded shit who thinks he’s hot stuff, right, heh? You know that Paisley whore is using ya like all whores do—especially yer fucking mother. They’re both stuck-up wenches. Fucking retards, hehe.”

Some force coercively restrained the uneasy boy from answering, because he knew he was despondent in his situation. Seeing his vulnerable state, his father, with rage, ranted: “Huh? Hey, what is with that fucking trembling? Are you scared, hehe?” He punched

Maxwell right in the face and caused him to fall swiftly to the ground. A loud thud and soft whimpering were heard.

It's all fucking hopeless, the boy thought.

"Hey ya fucker, get up. Are you just going to sit there and do nothing like yer indolent harlot of a mother? Are ya planning on fighting back? Haha, what a pitiful piece of shit. Ya dare believe I'm some discount observer who can't see through you, hehe. I can't fathom yer stupidity sometimes, boy. Ya remind me an awful lot of yer fruity brother, living with yer licentious mother, who merely spends his days selling his body. He's a dirty queer only to spite me. He's a bad example and disgrace to our family. I don't have an inkling of where they are now, but I can only assume they are drowning in lethargy and primal lust instead of contributing to society. God damn libertines. I work every fucking day, and they just sit around in pools of cash they got from marketing their bodies. FUCK THEM FOR EVERYTHING!"

"Yer bitchy mother didn't even have any physical assets that got my rocks off, hehe. She's as useless as they come, haha."

Clenching his fist tightly wanting to beat his belligerent father to a bloody pulp, Maxwell slowly tried to move upstairs with the intention of escaping the brewing storm downstairs. Amid his walk, he ruminated: "God, that man is such a revolting bastard; he's no human but a drugged up beast. Dammit all! If only the time would come, where he would get back the memories of distraught from what the Black Paragon did to us, then maybe life would be easier again. Afterwards, I could help him get off his drug habit—the only thing currently that gives him pleasure in life. Perhaps, one day, his humanity would—"

Thump! The noise, near his eardrums and accompanied by swift stamps closing in, caught the boy off guard and caused him to forcefully tumble down the endless stairs as far as the fourth step. Reality then crushed his hopes of his father breaking free from the depths of despair.

"Oww...Ouch! Fucking hell!" Maxwell cried with tears. "Why the fuck would you do that, fucking—" "Hold it boy, ya weren't fucking listening to me." His father shouted. "Don't forget the fact that ya broke yer curfew. That means I'll get the belt, the one yer all too familiar of, and smack some sense into ya. No fucking objections, boy!" "But dad—" "Shut it, boy!" He retorted. "Ya fucking listen to me and me alone! To Hell with those retarded friends of yers. All I've seen them do is cause ya more trouble than you want. You are far better than to stoop to their inferior intelligence. They are likely dirty queers, just like yer brother, hehe. Now boy, get yer slow ass over here—"

Maxwell, fed up with his father, did what no other boy his age would attempt, lest they would get harshly punished: He kicked his old man to the tile flooring and knocked him out cold. Out of fear, he raced upstairs to his room and locked the door hoping his father would be out cold and forget the entire thing tomorrow—he was accustomed to it.

The boy passed out in his bed with a torrent of tears and embitterment. *It's all fucking hopeless.* His bed consoled him like an affectionate mother would to her child. Maxwell cherished these instances of serenity, as it reminded him of the days his family was tightly knit as far as blood can be. *Those fiendish bastards.*

Right before he lowered his eyelids to sleep, he briefly wished: "If only the things from the past would come back. I miss it all so so much."

The silent sound of the wind inside—although thunderous outside—made for a calming lullaby much like what his mother sang to him as an infant. His bed respired the brisk air from outside; this made the boy recall what happened to his father downstairs. He was terrified of the thought of his father waking up. "I'd probably be sent to live with the wolves and shadows that roamed the external world," he thought. He fell asleep soundly while questioning how they must be holding up.

That despairing sensation...when will it let up?

Darius approached his working-class abode which was, like Maxwell's, full of dead Hickory trees in the front yard and backyard with uncut sepia-colored grass and fecal matter of deceased wild animals sprinkled haphazardly onto the parched ground. He observed no light seeping through the rectangular windows of his home. The front door was completely open at an almost 90 degree angle as to welcome the boy back home. He stepped his way inside and went into the living room only to find a dimly lit lamp resting on the table near the couches. The couches stared fiercely at the lost boy eager to cuddle him—and his father was passed out on the mahogany armchair a couple yards from the enthusiastic couches. The potent scent of dried up booze with a myriad of empty beer cans littered the floors of both the downstairs and upstairs—excluding Darius' room. All of this wasn't unusual for the boy nevertheless, considering his father was widely known by the townsfolk as the town drunk—and a very

unruly one. Daily, he adds more cans to his prized assortment; perhaps, he could literally swim in beer cans if he collects enough.

The boy trudged through the loads of beer cans and reached the kitchen area which too had its fair share of cans on the floor. He decided to whip up a quick and easy snack—chips.

Maxwell's unimpressed face, Weston's abrupt anger, and Paisley's smile to pity me...gah, he thought.

The boy put his hand on the loose bag of potato chips. The bag let out a few that landed on the ground in front of him; the other chips not expelled slumbered calmly inside the bag. He instinctively reached for the one closest to the outside world and gingerly crunched the chip to enjoy the palatable salt sprinkled on it. His mother once said to him: "Oh dear, you are undoubtedly the brightest spirit I have seen in my life—close to the shining one of your grandmother. I truly hope you remain this way and dismiss the evils of this town; they will torment you incessantly, if you decide otherwise, and sooner or later, they will drag you to your grave and compel you to do things you would never picture yourself doing." Darius broke out into little tears which soon drifted to his bone dry lips and brought back a brief amount of life into his soul.

What sublime pain, I suppose.

The boy moved his way to his bedroom for the night. It was close to the kitchen area only needing at most 15 steps to reach it beginning from the end of the kitchen that faces the bedroom. It was no more spacious than 80 square feet—minimal for relief. His

bed was simply a bare twin size mattress draped with dark green and bleached, white blankets. Papers and expired open food were bestrewn on the flooring. A desk—one that practically takes up one fourth of the room's space—was heaped top-to-bottom with more papers, withered pencils, and dried up markers.

Fucking hell! Just sleep and forget these emotions like you always do; there's no need for them in these times. I should listen to the others; it isn't always about me, right mother?

"Sis, how are ya holding up?" Weston asked. "Fine, I guess." Paisley was in no mood to give emotion to her strung out brother; she was deeply ashamed yet understanding to some degree of him. "What's the matter, sis? Are ya holding back something—" "Shut your trap, Weston. I don't want to talk when you're another person—under the spell of that evil substance. You wonder why mother despises—" "Shut the fuck up! Ya ain't know nothing, sis. Remember, what I said earlier—don't ya forget it!"

Will you for once free yourself of those emotions?

The two reached their house: made of sturdy bricks, untouched windows, and lit by the midnight shadows roaming the streets. Beside the house was an unkempt garden made up of dead flowers—roses, daisys, and sunflowers—and contorted sycamore trees—roughly three to four of them. The dead plants welcomed Weston and Paisley back by sweeping a couple small leaves their way. One of the leaves caressed Paisley and whispered: Come right in, girl. We all love your company, and I assure you that your mother is happy to see you, hehe. Ey, cheer up and enjoy the bliss while you can, heh.

The silhouette of a hunched creature with long, messy hair and claws for hands grasped the inside door handle and creaked it open, just as Weston and Paisley walked up to the doorstep, and the inexplicable leaves finished their talk and blew back to the garden for much needed rest. "Is that you, Mr. Glenn Sutton?" she asked. "No mother, it's us: Weston and Paisley," Paisley answered. "Huh...oh right! It is you two. How dare you show your unsightly faces at MY house, huh?"

"It's not what you may think, mother," Paisley replied apprehensively. "We mean no harm...is that right Weston?" "Ugh, that's easy for you to say." That's right, Weston. She doesn't deserve special treatment. Fucking bitch. he reasoned. The boy held his tongue however and allowed his sister to situate things for their sake.

The moon's light illuminated the creature whom was a hideous human being: rumped, silvery hair that went down to her stomach, thin, flimsy arms and legs, teeth more yellow than the sun, some of which had minuscule cracks, and brown covered fingernails that extended as far as claws of a witch.

"If you want to come in, you can only sleep in the basement. You want to know why you are getting that accomodation? Because you brats foolishly went past your curfew! For heaven's sake, I was worried sick—as any mother would. Those bad influences and atheists are only corrupting your brains! All you two need in life is your dear mother—not those heathens.

What a bitch. Weston thought. "Hey there, what's with the frown, son? Don't tell me you are against your dear mother's wishes." "Weston, just calm down, please. Smile for mother. Show her you

are at the very least listening," Paisley whispered. Weston begrudgingly obliged with his hands clenched into fists and his feet ready to kick his excuse of a mother right smack in her putrid mug.

"Er...fine, we accept our consequences," Paisley said—not to her delight. *Damn that woman.* "Very well, come in children. You wouldn't want the shadows lurking in the night hours pursuing you, right, hehe?"

They entered the house behind their mother who then grabbed her cane resting on a wall a couple yards from them. The rest of the house was engulfed with darkness, except for a faint silhouette of a bird visible in the right-most window. It flew elsewhere, once Weston noticed the silhouette.

Strange. I swear I saw the shadow of some bird near the window. Hmm...hmm...ah, it must be my imagination. Weston pondered.

They reached the door that led to the basement. The handle was frigid, as though it hadn't been open in years and had to have been flimsier than spindly rope. *It must be my imagination.* The old woman gripped it tightly with her tremulous hands you would expect a woman in her 60s to have.

The door creaked open and the dingy lighting of the living room shun on the wooden steps showing them what appeared to be cracks all over the steps—identical to the markings an animal would give undergoing torture. "This place is seriously giving me the creeps," Weston muttered. The aura of a great peril was all too familiar to the venturers of this basement.

Right when Weston and Paisley walked inside, their mother instantly shut the door behind them, and the cramped room's meager lighting vanished before the two. A locking sound and bestial cackle caught the attention of the two. "FUCK you, god damn bitch. I will fucking kill ya and make decorations out of your intestines, haha," Weston hollered.

"Weston, please calm yourself," Paisley asserted. "Just wait 'till morning, and maybe she'll regain her senses like always." "Fuck that shit, sis. Get back in reality for fucks sakes." *How ironic for a meth junkie like you, Weston.* "I think I can bust this fucking door open in a matter of minutes, ha, and then that wench will personally get a piece of my fist, haha...haha...ha...heh." *Typical, typical as usual. Never listens to anyone but himself. How can someone be so selfish? Who knows. I just hope he gets taught a lesson for his meth consumption, so he can at the very least be normal again. Maybe.*

An hour later, both were resting on the ground almost in a fetal-like position since there were no blankets nor a mattress to sleep on. Weston was rightfully unsettled by the lightless room's atmosphere. Like with the bird silhouette he saw earlier, he could somehow detect the same presence inside the basement with them. Not this time, perhaps. Weston thought. With Paisley out cold on the damp, hard floor, Weston whipped out a flashlight he had carried with him to the Grizzly Riders meeting, and scanned the entire basement for any signs of life but to no avail.

He could only find the furnace, piled up old boxes with red stains on the openings, and rundown furniture (chairs, counters, tables, etc.). *It must be my imagination.* Weston went back to

where Paisley was and reclined on a crate several yards from her but not far enough to be unable to make out her features. At a snail's pace, he shut his eyes with the notion that a new day was awaiting him and it would be promising. *The future is in our hands now.*

Everyone is asleep now. It thought. I shall alert the others before dawn.

It departed from one of the sycamore tree branches that faced the right-most window of the property. The moon moved from its highest point in the sky and shined its radiance upon Timber Street. The empty street was now a placid paradise, as soon as ambiance took command and allowed the sleeping teens to rest easy—for the time being.

CHAPTER TWO: THE NEXT DAY

CHAPTER THREE: THE WIDOW

CHAPTER FOUR: THE LYNCH

CHAPTER FIVE: REALITY

CHAPTER SIX: THE ESCAPE

CHAPTER SEVEN: REMEMBRANCE